Transcript for The Anime Nostalgia Podcast – ep 139: Anime Frontier 2024 Report & Damien Haas Interview (Podcast episode released in January of 2025, transcript by Dawn H.)

Hello everyone, and welcome to another episode of the Anime Nostalgia Podcast! As always, I am your host Dawn, and this month I have a special podcast episode for you all–normally, this month's episode would be a short ReView episode where I find an older anime title I haven't seen in a while, rewatch it, and share my thoughts. But this month, I thought I'd do a little report on my trip to Anime Frontier last month.

For those who don't know, Anime Frontier is a 3-day anime convention that takes place in Fort Worth Texas every December. This con is still fairly new, as it started out in 2021.In 2022 I was lucky enough to actually be one of the guests at their convention! This was my first time going back since then, this time just as Press so I could cover the con as more of a regular con-goer than a special guest…though I did get to do a few fun things as a press person, which I hope you all will enjoy hearing about! So, let's go through my time at Anime Frontier 2024, and go through some of the highlights of the weekend!

One of the first things I got to do was to check out the return of Bandai-Namco's Gundam Base Pop-up. For those of you who are lucky enough to have done some traveling, you might already be familiar with Gundam Base: While there are several Gundam Bases in Japan, others started as pop-ups outside of Japan in 2003, with some ending up as permanent locations in Korea, Taiwan, and other locations across Asia. So seeing one of these pop-ups in the US is a special treat! The Gundam Base at Anime Frontier is part nerd museum, part shopping experience, and part workshop, complete with its trademark giant RX-78 GUNDAM statue welcoming everyone in. Around the perimeter of the Gundam Base, where folks line up to enter, there are multiple displays to check out. There were displays of new Gunpla models, and even a huge timeline on all the various Gundam anime shows, which was really cool to see.

Inside the Gundam Base, there was a cool display detailing what exactly Gunpla is. For those unaware, "Gunpla" is a portmanteau of the words "Gundam" and "Plastic model". So when you hear fans talking about all the Gunpla they have, they're talking about the plastic model kits you can buy to put together to look like the various Gundam mechs, machines, and even characters themselves from throughout the various Gundam franchises. So of course, the Gundam Base was also chock-full of not only Gunpla kits, but accessories for the kits (such as panel-lining markers, decals, and other helpful

tools), alongside the usual collectibles and merch. The back of Gundam Base also had space for workshops–throughout the weekend, they had multiple times when folks could come and not only pick up a free beginner RX-78 kit, but they could learn about building Gunpla with friends and get tips on building from the Bandai-Namco crew.

Speaking of the crew, I got to chat with Justin Cavender, the Senior Manager of Marketing and Communications for Bandai-Namco while I was there! While he showed me around Gundam Base (and I of course, made a couple of purchases of my own), I found out that he too was a long time anime fan who spent a fair amount of time watching anime back in the fansubbed VHS days. We both reminisced about how times really have changed–it used to be kind of difficult to get Gunpla kits if you were an Otaku living in the US. If you didn't have some kind of dedicated comic or anime store that could order them for you, you had to find someone who could, which usually came at an inflated price. Now, Gunpla kits are much easier to get your hands on in America, with anime stores, hobby shops, Kinokuniya locations, and even mainstream places like Target carrying them on occasion.

Still, visiting a place like Gundam Base is very special, as they carried a lot of items that were exclusive or harder to find alongside the more common kits and accessories. When I asked Justin about the possibility of permanent Gundam Base locations ever opening in America, he admitted it was something that he would love to have happen, but as of this time there's no plans underway for one. Hopefully, it's just a matter of time until it does happen, because the whole time I was in Gundam Base, the place was truly jumping–so many fans were there to celebrate their love of Gundam and Gunpla building, and almost all of them left that weekend with bags filled to the brim with new kits to add to their backlog.

I was also given a tour of Bandai-Namco's other booth for the weekend, which was their Gashapon shop! Even if you're not familiar with the word "Gashapon", you've probably seen it before: they're little capsule machines that contain various small, collectable goods like keychains, mini figures, pouches, and other surprise goods. Americans are probably familiar with the tiny bubblegum style machines that we see in grocery stores, where for a few quarters you could get some sort of extremely cheap toy, or a handful of candy. But Bandai's Gashapon are MUCH fancier than that. Originally launched in 1977, Bandai-Namco's Gashapon machines were once again named after a portmanteau: this time of two Japanese onomatopoeias. The first, "Gasha", is the Japanese word for the sound of the vending machine handle turning after you insert your tokens. The second, "Pon", is the Japanese word for the sound of the plastic capsule landing in the tray.

Anime fans are no stranger to Gashapon goods–since they've been around in Japan for decades, fans would often seek out anime, manga, and video-game related Gashapon goods for their collections, as companies would often put out lines for popular series and characters. In the past, most fans had to buy these second-hand from resellers. But in recent years, we've seen the rise of actual Gashapon machines being made available now in the US for fans to buy for themselves in person. In fact, Bandai-Namco has been opening official Gashapon shops and stations all around the US, in many malls and shopping centers. When I asked some of the staff why they thought they were seeing a rise in popularity stateside for Gashapon, they agreed with me that one of the reasons is the growing love of things like mystery bags and surprise boxes, which have started to dominate not just anime and hobby shops, but general merchandise stores as well.

The Gashapon station booth was extremely busy, as there were fans there not just for the anime goods, but for general kawaii goods in general, such as machines featuring Sanrio and San-X characters, and even video game goods like Tamagochi and Kirby. I was even delighted to spot machines featuring goods for older series, like Yu Yu Hakusho, Saint Seiya, and Dragon Ball. Justin and his crew were very generous and gave me a few free tokens to try the machines myself, which was incredibly fun. My favorite pulls were from a machine that had tiny replicas of the Evangelion VHS releases from the 90s! While I was there, they were promoting a new Gashapon shop opening in Grapevine, Texas, which looks to be the largest in the state so far. I recommend checking out Bandai-Namco's official Gashapon website, us.gashapon.jp, to see where you can find official Gashapon locations near you–they seem to be popping up new locations all over the US pretty regularly now! They're extremely fun, and offer a ton of variety as the contents and merch are always changing.

During the con, I also got to go to my first ever Dark Horse Comics manga panel! I've always wanted to check out Dark Horse's official in-person panels, but before this I'd never actually been to a convention where they'd been present. Presenting at the panel was Dark Horse's senior Manga Editor Carl Horn, as well as one of their regular manga translators, Zack Davisson. While they didn't announce any new titles at this panel, I still enjoyed it immensely because they talked in depth about not only titles that are going to be coming out throughout the year, but some of the history of the titles themselves, and the work that goes into translating each one. Carl and Zack worked well presenting all of it together, with their years of combined experience, explaining some behind-the-scenes work to fans in a way that was both entertaining and easy to understand. I hope to be able to go to more Dark Horse panels in the future (and not

JUST because I won a prize in their raffle, either!)

Now, something I'm really excited to share with you all is very special–during the con, I was able to schedule a short interview with voice actor Damian Haas: also known as the dub voice of everyone's favorite eternal lost boy, Ryoga Hibiki, in the brand new Ranma ½ anime that recently premiered on Netflix! Damian was kind enough to answer a few questions about his work as Ryoga, as well as humoring me for some discussion on what he thinks one of his most popular characters might do about a certain little cursed pig… I hope you enjoy it!

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Dawn: Well, before we start, I have a little gift for you.

Damien Haas: Oh, that's so sweet!

[Here I presented him with a sticker I made years ago, from an old photoshop someone made of Ryoga in the style of "Where in the world is Carmen SanDiego?" logo, that says "Where in Japan is Ryoga Hibiki?"]

Haas: Awwww, NO WAY! I love this!

Dawn: (laughs) It's a little sticker!

Hass: This is so cute! (holds up the sticker to show his friend) Where in Japan is Ryoga Hibiki!

Friend in the background: *LITTLE BOY!*

Haas: So sweet. So sweet! Little fellow. Thank you very much!

Dawn: You're welcome!

Haas: I appreciate it.

Dawn: I was very excited when I heard you were going to be here because Ryoga is my boy. [Here I hold up my lanyard, which has a very large P-chan button on it.]

Haas: P-chan! Yay!

Dawn: A friend of mine got this for me in Japan like, in 2019.

Haas: That's so sweet. It's held up great.

Dawn: Listen Flavor had a collab with uh, Ranma.

Haas: I love that.

Dawn: Yes, so I was like...*My boy*!

Haas: My son!

Dawn: My sweet little meow meow!

Haas: (Singing) *Look at my son!*

Dawn: Well, first of all: Congratulations on getting the role of Ryoga!

Haas: Thank you so much.

Dawn: Uh, everyone--my listeners specifically, like The Anime Nostalgia Podcast that I run, is all about, um...pre-2000s anime and manga and the history--

Haas: okay!

Dawn: -- so obviously my listeners are very excited about all the new Rumiko Takahashi stuff.

Haas: Sure!

Dawn: Specifically Ranma because that was such a formative--

Haas: Yeah!

Dawn: --90s series for a lot of people. So, uh, where you a fan of the series before you auditioned?

Haas: I was aware of the series. I had not, um, seen anything specifically from it. My sister was my sort of gateway into anime. She's seven years older than I am.

Dawn: Ahhh!

Haas: So when it came to that sort of era, the things that were playing in my house were Sailor Moon, Slayers, Magic Knight Rayearth, and then later I stumbled upon Pokemon myself--

Dawn: Ah-haaa.

Haas: --And then sort of put two and two together. So yeah, I missed the classic Ranma

phase, both the original 18 episode run, and then the--

Both: --Continuation.

Haas: Yeah! But, um, I'd be excited to go back one day now. I'll probably take some time because I want to Have an authentically like new experience--

Dawn: Yeah!

Haas: --while, I am reading the manga.

Dawn: Oh! Mmm-hmm.

Haas: And so I want to take my own spin on that for the recording of this. But at some point I'll go back.

Dawn: Yeah, that's–

Haas: That was the longest run-on sentence ever. So sorry.

Dawn: No, no, no!

Haas: Coffee's kicking in.

Dawn: You're fine. You're fine! So I have to ask, do you also do the voice of P- Chan?

Haas: I do not.

Dawn: You don't?!

Haas: P-Chan is also, that's voiced by Rachel Slotky. She's someone I had met a couple times in passing, but uh, she does some voicing, but also works on the back end of things for producing these shows. So it was really exciting to...find that she was going to be my counterpart.

Dawn: Oh, that's interesting.

Haas: Yeah!

Dawn: Does she do anything else on the new Ranma?

Haas: Ah, that I don't know. That I don't know, but yeah. She does a great job as P.-chan.

Dawn: Yeah, I was, uh...I was like, I don't think it's him, but I want to make sure.

(laughs)

Haas: You know, I went in expecting to do it and preparing to do it.

Dawn: (nods) Right.

Haas: And then when they were like, no, that's Rachel, I was like, that's awesome.

Dawn: Oh, interesting.

Haas: That's actually great.

Dawn: Do you know how to spell her name?

Haas: She's on the socials...Let me quickly pull this up because I feel like sometimes I put in the phantom letter.

Dawn: Yeah, uh, I want to make sure I credit her correctly.

Haas: R-A-C-H-E-L-S-L-O-T.

Dawn: (repeats) S-L-O-T.

Haas: K-Y. Yeah, I always accidentally put in a Z. And I'm like, oh, it's Rachel Slotsky. Because in my brain, I'm like, Slotzky's--

Both: *Deli!*

Dawn: (laughs)

Haas: Yeah, so.

Dawn: So, ah, how much fun do you have in the recording booth with this character? Do you get to like, ad-lib at all?

Haas: It's great. Um...Ad-libbing varies from uh, director to director when it comes to series. But, um, where I do sort of get to have some input there is, we work very hard. And uh, the director, Jaylen, works very hard on making sure that the mouth movements make sense with the dialogue. So sometimes you'll have to readjust things on the fly.

Dawn: Right.

Haas: Um, And while it's not necessarily my job to do that, I will always check if someone's comfortable first. And I might offer up like, hey, this actually sounds like a fun

way to say it, would that work? And yeah, um…but mostly they allow me to have those kinds of creative inputs with performance itself. Where I'm like, you know, for example, the first episode that Ryoga appears in, he's just like, you know, “Where's Ranma? Where's Furinkan High School?”

Dawn: Right.

Haas: Like, “Do you know where it is? Do you know where it is?!” So for the last one, right as I'm about to actually stumble upon it, or Ryoga's about to stumble upon it, the line is like, “Do you know where Furinkan High School is?” Straight up, you know, of course you're asking everybody.

Dawn: Right. (nods)

Haas: But I was like, can I say it like, “Do ***you*** know where it is?!”

Dawn: (laughs)

Haas: As though I've asked people all day, and then it's just like *you* finally, this is a continuation of like, (says in an almost evil sounding voice) “Do ***you*** know where it is?!”

Dawn: (laughs some more)

Haas: So they allowed that, and I was like, okay, that's a little bit of character sprinkled in very early on.

Dawn: Yeah, yeah! That's great, that's awesome.

Haas: Thank you.

Dawn: Um, So, what do you love about Ryoga as a character and do you share any character traits with him?

Haas: I think Ryoga is bullish for lack of a better term.

Dawn: Mmmm (nods)

Haas: He charges forward at something he believes in and that's something that I think, you know, is-is very beneficial to learn in a sort of tempered way because I'm somebody that can, I can be a little bit too demure, I can be a little bit too like, I don't wanna step on anyone's toes--

Dawn: Right.

Haas: --but to specifically, you know, charge for it and be like, no, this is what I believe and that's what I'm going to do is awesome.

Dawn: Yeah, yeah.

Haas: You shouldn't necessarily wander through Hokkaido by mistake in the process, but.

Dawn: (laughs) He takes it a little...

Hass: Takes it a little...

Both: --*TOO* far.

Haas: But I do love that he embodies that trait of, this is what I believe, I'm gonna go for it. And there's so many moments even brought up like, “Hey, this is a bad idea. Did you even think about this?” It's like, no, I'm thinking about it *now*, but I'm still doing the thing.

Dawn: (laughs)

Haas: You know, it's fun to play characters with strong points of view.

Dawn: Yeah. Yeah. He does have....kind of blinders on once he's set into something.

Haas: Yeah. The wheel is turning but the hamster's dead.

Dawn: (laughs) Yes.

Hass: Is how I put it.

Dawn: Definitely. Um, So since you also do the voice of Laios in Delicious in Dungeon--

Haas: Mmm hmm!

Dawn: --which I know a lot of people love, um... I also have to ask: if Laios ever knew the secret of P-Chan, would he want to eat him?

Hass: *Whew*! So while I am, you know...n-not official--

Dawn: Of course.

Haas: --like this is nothing canon, not my place. Um, I don't think Laios would.

Dawn: Really?

Haas: I think when Laios questions whether it's okay to eat something or not, it's always a monster. And it's always, you know, the show raises the question about like, what about demi-humans? Like a fish man.

Dawn: Mm-hmm.

Haas: And Laios' whole thing is like, well, that's way more fish than person.

Dawn: Mmm. (nods)

Haas: Like this thing is not a human, it's a fish monster. Like let's maybe try part of it. But P-chan, like, that's Ryoga!

Dawn: Yeah. That's a dude!

Haas: That's a dude! It's a human, and it's a pig, but it's a human. Like, no amount of asterisk next to the pig thing can change the fact that, like, that's a human.

Dawn: Yeah. That's true, that's true. But I just had to, I was like, that's something that popped into my head. I was like, I wonder...

Haas: I'm sure Laios would have the intrusive thought of, like, I wonder if....he would taste different than other humans because he's also a pig. What do you taste like pig?

Dawn: Yeah! Would he taste like pig?? (laughs)

Haas: But also that brings up the very dark thing that supposedly, well....God, am I about to say it?

Dawn: (laughs, wheezes)

Haas: Sorry. Supposedly, pig and human have the closest taste to one another.

Dawn: That's what I was thinking!

Haas: So, Laios would probably, you know what Laios would do? He would have a conversation exactly like this and see who's looking at me. Is anyone looking? Is everything fine? Like, can we just talk about it?

Dawn: (more wheeze-laughing)

Haas: I'm not gonna *eat him*, you know, just talk, you know?

Dawn: A great conversation.

Haas: Sure, a very normal and good conversation that's normal!

Dawn: Well, thank you so very much uh, for this lovely conversation. Is there anything that you want to say to uh, the old school Ranma fans out there?

Haas: Yeah, absolutely. Um, I wanna thank the old school Ranma fans and the community as a whole for being so kind and trusting me with the role of Ryoga. Um, I know it's difficult stepping into a role that has previously been seen, previously been read, and when you have decades of either a voice in your head build up or how the Japanese voice actor sounded in the original or Japanese voice actor sounds in the current or the English one in the original, like it's...a lot of potential expectation build up.

Dawn: Right.

Haas: And everyone, so far as I've seen, has been very kind. And the internet is not always that way. So thank you for letting me try my best and have fun with our boy.

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Thank you once again Damien Hass for the Interview! And I hope you all enjoyed it.

One of the last things I did during Anime Frontier 2024 was check out one of their latest additions to their programming: A Swap Meet! Now, if you know me, you know I LOVE not only digging for treasures (be it at thrift stores or at convention booths), but also saving money, which is one of the reasons I absolutely love it when conventions have Swap Meets. And the ones at Anime Frontier this year were my favorite type: strictly no money, just the straightforward swapping of items for items. I believe this is the first year there’s been swap meets on the Anime Frontier schedule, and I’m really glad now that several of the other older cons in the DFW area have recently shuttered. Swap Meets are a great way to do some spring cleaning to our collections, especially if you’re like me and have been a nerd for years and years, as that usually means you’ve also accumulated quite a bit of nerd stuff along the way. There was a great variety of folks at the Swap I went to (they had a scheduled swap for each day of the con, if I recall, though I only went to the one on the final day)--people of various ages, fandoms, and

collection types were present there. I saw folks swapping everything from physical anime and manga, to cosplay and lolita fashion items, to wallscrolls, figures, and kuji prizes. Even an older fan like me was able to trade the bulk of the items I brought with me for some new-to-me goodies! Which felt good, because I got rid of quite a lot of things without having to deal with the hassle of selling them online. Some of the cool things I ended up bringing home from the swap included some vintage Viz-manga single issue floppies, some Japanese buttons and keychains from Gegege no Kitaro and Banana Fish, and an actual movie theater poster for the American run of The First Slam Dunk! Not too shabby. I really hope they keep doing these Swaps in future con years, because it's always one of my favorite things to do–a great way to feel like you got some cool new stuff without spending a dime.

As for some of the other aspects of Anime Frontier, I'll go through a quick little rundown. The Artist Alley has grown quite a bit since my last visit in 2022, with a wide variety of creators there. While the Dealers in the Exhibor's Hall are mostly geared towards newer anime & manga fans, there were still a few sellers I found that also carried a decent amount of vintage stuff, if you're older like me and are on the lookout for stuff like that. If you're someone who likes going to cons to see voice actors & special guests to get autographs, Anime Frontier has an area just for those guests. But unlike a lot of the older anime cons, where meeting guests and getting autographs only cost you the time of standing and waiting in line to see them, if you want an autograph you'll have to pay for each one you get. So make sure to keep that in mind for your budget when you visit!

Something I really liked was that the con had a dedicated quiet area sponsored by Ito-En called the "Tranquili-Tea Lounge". It was a simple meeting room with chairs and tables, strategically placed just down the hall from the main hub of the con, and stocked with free bottles of Ito-En's unsweetened green tea, where folks were encouraged to rest and recharge if needed. I'm a big fan of cons starting to pick up on making dedicated quiet and sensory-friendly areas for people who need them, because as much as I enjoy going to these cons, they can get overwhelming sometimes! Anime Frontier also had an accessibility seating area just outside of the main entrance of the Exhibition floor for folks who needed a place to sit for a few and rest, which was nice, though I'd definitely love to see MORE of these areas inside the actual Exhibition hall as well–the Exhibition floor is HUGE, and while there is a couple of seating areas in the spaces where food and drinks are sold, having a few more spots for sitting around the parameters of the con floor would be ideal for folks who need them. There were a few times where my old ass got pretty exhausted hobbling around with my cane, and taking the extra time to find a

place to sit and rest for a few just ended up making me extra exhausted on a couple of occasions. While I did get an accessibility bracelet for myself, I didn't really get a chance to put it to use, as I didn't end up going to any panels with long lines, or any of the big events like the concerts. So I can't really give much an opinion on how Anime Frontier did in those regards. But every staff person I interacted with was pretty helpful and very nice, so I don't have anything to complain about in that regard.

I think the ONE thing I'm not a huge fan of is that there isn't a ton of food options directly around the convention center. So you're pretty much stuck with whatever food and drink they offer in the small food areas in the Exhibition hall, or whatever you're willing to bring with you from home or elsewhere. I will say, there were a couple of times I had some of the food offered from the convention's food stalls, and they weren't bad, but nothing to write home about and not always cheap. I'd love to see the con invite some local food trucks to hang out near the con, at least, that'd be a fun way to get more options AND support more local businesses! Oh, and speaking of outside: For cosplayers, there's a lot of pretty areas outside the con for photoshoots, too; such as the Water Garden, which is another added bonus.

So when all is said and done, I had another fantastic time at Anime Frontier! If you'd been thinking about possibly going, I think it's a great December anime con that's run pretty well and consistently gets enjoyable guests and has interesting programming. With older DFW-area anime cons like Anime Fest and A-kon seeming to close their doors, Anime Frontier seems to be one of the main cons picking up where they left off, which I appreciate a whole lot. It might be a bit more of a trek to get to if you're in Dallas proper, but on the whole, I feel like the quality of the con is very much worth it.

I hope you all enjoyed this report on last month's Anime Frontier! Please let me know what you thought of this episode, since this is my first time doing something like this. Did you like hearing about this con? Did it make you want to check out this con? And did you enjoy the interview with Damien Haas? Let me know in the comments, I'd love to hear what you think!

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I introduced my partner MDi to the movie “Time of Eve” for the first time, which was a lot of fun to record. So many thanks to my monthly subscribers, especially those who are on the Anime Club Producer tier! A huge thanks to Ducknuts, Variasuitgirl, Tricia, Utenasuire, malpertuis, Oberatixx, Amish Priest, and The Worst Guy! And as always, thanks to those who left me one-time tips on ko-fi this month, including Gavadon, Micheal B, Diligent Dodo, Maddy, Avane, Otacat, Nidokorn, Larry The Tired Anime Dad, Tim, Maggie, Rorydropkick, Paula, Tehkei, Mary, Anile, Haxero, and several folks who wished to remain anonymous! Thank you all so much for being my first tips of the year, I really appreciate it!

If you want to get a shout-out on the podcast to be just as cool as they are, all you have to do is go to my Ko-fi account and subscribe at the Anime Club Producer level, or leave me a one-time tip of two or more "coffees". I'll have a link to that in the show notes, which you can see at animenostalgia.blogspot.com, as well as at animenostalgia.tumblr.com, where you can also find other relevant links for this episode, as well as links to past episodes. You can also find this podcast on apple podcasts, spotify, and pretty much wherever you get your podcasts! Just do a search for The Anime Nostalgia podcast, and you can usually find it. And while you're there, you could always show my podcast some love by leaving a rating or a review! I always love seeing what people have to say about the podcast. Or if you want to send me your thoughts and comments directly, or you just want to say hi, you can always email me at AnimeNostalgiaPodcast@gmail.com! It might take me a little while to get back to you, but I promise that I do read all the email that I get.

My amazing theme song music was done by Kerobit! You can find out more about them and their music at Kerobit.net

As always, I’ve been your host Dawn, and I’ll see you next time!